

(19)

Europäisches Patentamt

European Patent Office

Office européen des brevets



(11)

EP 0 940 658 A1

(12)

EUROPEAN PATENT APPLICATION

published in accordance with Art. 158(3) EPC

(43) Date of publication:
08.09.1999 Bulletin 1999/36

(51) Int. Cl.⁶: G01F 23/296

(21) Application number: 98936771.9

(86) International application number:
PCT/RU98/00210

(22) Date of filing: 22.06.1998

(87) International publication number:
WO 99/14562 (25.03.1999 Gazette 1999/12)

(84) Designated Contracting States:
AT BE CH CY DE DK ES FI FR GB GR IE IT LI LU
MC NL PT SE

(30) Priority: 15.09.1997 RU 97115533

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(54) ULTRASOUND SENSOR FOR DETECTING THE LEVEL OF LIQUIDS

(57) The invention relates to liquid level indicators using measurement of sound waves parameters.

The ultrasonic liquid level detector contains a detector case (1), a rod acoustic waveguide (2) on one end of which there is an acoustical-electrical transducer (3) and on the other - a hollow resonator (4). The resonator (4) space is isolated from an external medium, the detector case (1) is fixed rigidly and hermetically on the surface of the rod acoustic waveguide (2) in a zone of minimum rod oscillations of the rod acoustic waveguide at operating detector frequency and contains an attachment means for attaching the detector to an external base.

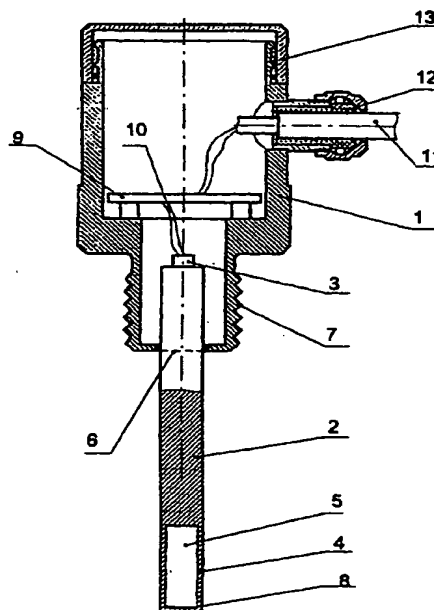


FIG 1

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Description

Application Field

[0001] The invention relates to liquid level indicators 5
using measurement of sound waves parameters.

Background of the Invention

[0002] Designs of ultrasonic liquid level detectors are 10
known where resonators and tuning forks are driven with the help of sound waves. The acoustic parameters of resonators and tuning forks vary when contacting liquid, medium with higher density than air, and these variations are detected.

[0003] The design according to DE patent N 4201360 15
can serve as an example. The device contains two or more vibratory rods put into reservoir under control which are connected with radiating and receiving transducers. The same principle is used in the "Device for detection and/or control of filled reservoir level" according to DE patent N 4118793 or the "Device for measurement and/or keeping of given level in a reservoir" according to the International application WO 92/21945.

[0004] The given designs of the liquid level detectors 20
depend on operating conditions. Liquid and dirt remaining in the tuning fork spaces can influence measurement accuracy of the mentioned devices.

[0005] A device for liquid level detection is known from 25
DE patent N 3011603 priority 26.03.80, Int. Cl. G 01 F 23/28. The device contains vibratory elements placed co-axial. The space between the vibratory elements is isolated from the medium and is located throughout the whole length of the rod. Piezoelements are fixed on membrane inserts connected with one of the vibrators. The case of the device is fixed to the membrane insert. The attachment joint of the device case to the external basement is made in the form of a threaded connection. The device differs from the offered invention in operating principle and design.

[0006] A further device for liquid level control is known 30
from DE application N 2949162 priority 06.12.79 Int. Cl. G 01 F 23/28. The device contains a hollow throughout the whole length waveguide to which radiator and receiver are fixed in different places. The case is not rigidly fixed to the waveguide and contains threaded connection for fixing to the external base.

[0007] Moreover an acoustic liquid level detector is 35
known from FR application N 2596515 priority 28.03.86 Int. Cl. G 01 F 23/28. The detector contains a rod hollow throughout the length and open to the surrounding medium. Another hollow throughout the length waveguide is installed inside the rod on which transducers are installed. The waveguide attachment points to the external base are not considered in this design.

[0008] An ultrasonic liquid level indicator is known 40
from SU Inventor's Certificate N 231151 wherein the detector consists of two separated waveguides. The

waveguides are fixed in the walls of the reservoir under control in the oscillation nodes.

[0009] The designs of all above mentioned ultrasonic 45
detectors differ from the offered one. Protection from the influence of condensate, remainders of liquid and dirt on measurement accuracy is not provided in the above designs.

[0010] The "Detector of Liquid Presence" according to 50
EP patent N 409732 priority 19.07.90 Int. Cl. G 01 F 23/28 is the closest in technical principle. The design of the detector contains a case, a measuring element connected with a pulse generator and a receiving device. The measuring element of this device includes an acoustical-electrical transducer and a compound acoustic waveguide connected to the transducer. The first part of the compound acoustic waveguide consists of a solid cylinder and the second one consists of a hollow cylinder. The first part of the waveguide is smaller in diameter than the second one.

[0011] The performance accuracy of the given detec- 55
tor design depends on conditions of the surrounding medium. Liquid remainders and other contaminations can accumulate in the open space. Liquid and dirt can also gather on the transducer and on the waveguide case at the place of junction (transition) to the greater diameter. All these can influence on accuracy of the detector performance.

Description of the Invention

[0012] It is an object of the present invention to reduce 60
detector performance dependence on surrounding medium and operating conditions thereby providing high accuracy and sensibility.

[0013] The ultrasonic liquid level detector according 65
to the invention contains a detector case and a rod acoustic waveguide on one end of which there is an acoustical-electrical transducer and on the other - a hollow resonator. The acoustical-electrical transducer serves for excitation of the rod acoustic waveguide which will oscillate on operating frequency depending on the resonator. Oscillation duration of the excited resonator will depend on whether it is placed in a gaseous medium or has a contact with liquid.

[0014] The novelty consists of the following.

[0015] The resonator cavity is isolated from the exter- 70
nal medium. Such a design allows to avoid accumulation of liquid and foreign matters and thus to avoid measurement errors. The resonator space is placed on the opposite to the acoustical-electrical transducer end of the waveguide. The space is placed where it is necessary to control the liquid level. This allows to reduce the influence of dirt and condensate because foreign matters deposited on the waveguide part which is not hollow do not practically influence measurement accuracy.

[0016] The detector case is fixed rigidly and hermetically on the surface of the rod acoustic waveguide in the

zone of minimum rod oscillations of the rod acoustic waveguide at detector operating frequency. Such case fixing on the rod acoustic waveguide allows to avoid ingress of moisture and foreign matters to the acoustical-electrical transducer and onto the waveguide upper part. In this case operation accuracy and sensitivity of the detector are not reduced due to rigid case fixing to the rod acoustic waveguide because it is fixed in the zone of minimum oscillations of the waveguide rod.

[0017] The detector case contains an attachment means for attaching said case to the external base. The location of the detector attachment means on the case also serves the solution of the set task. Since the case even rigidly and hermetically fixed on the acoustic waveguide influences by its mass on detector parameters only to the least extent, the case fixing on the external base by means of the attachment means does not practically influence detector parameters regardless of the base type.

[0018] In such a design there is no place on the rod acoustic waveguide where liquid, condensate and dirt can gather. The case isolates entirely the acoustical-electrical transducer and the waveguide part from external surrounding. In its turn the case does not practically influence on detector parameters on whatever base it was installed.

[0019] In a particular embodiment the resonator space is isolated from the external surrounding by a plate which is rigidly and hermetically fixed to the rod acoustic waveguide. The plate thickness is less than $W/12$, where W is the sound wavelength in the rod acoustic waveguide at operating frequency. Such plate thickness does not practically influence the detector sensitivity.

[0020] Besides, the case fixing zone on the surface of the rod acoustic waveguide should be placed in the nodes of longitudinal waveguide oscillations.

[0021] Such zone position under concrete values of detector operating frequency provides minimum case influence on detector parameters. For this purpose the distance between the fixing place and the transducer should be equal to an odd number of wavelengths quarters that with regard to acceptable spreads of this distance (equal to $W/12$) leads to the condition

$$W/4 \cdot [(2 \cdot k + 1) + 1/3] > L > W/4 \cdot [(2 \cdot k + 1) - 1/3],$$

where

W - sound wavelength in the rod acoustic waveguide at operating frequency;
 k - natural number.

[0022] Besides this the thickness of the detector case in the place of fixing on the rod acoustic waveguide is less than $W/12$, where W is the sound wave-length in the rod acoustic waveguide at operating frequency. It is necessary to provide minimum case influence on detec-

tor sensitivity.

[0023] In addition the attachment means of the detector case for attaching said case to the external base is made in the form of a threaded connection. Such a type of attachment provides additional effect. Parasitic oscillations of the external base in passing onto the detector case are absorbed to a large extent by the threaded connection and are then emitted in the form of heat energy. This provides greater independence of detector performance from external conditions.

[0024] Thus all features of the offered invention promote less dependence of detector performance on environment and operating conditions without reduction of its measurement accuracy and sensitivity.

[0025] The main features set of the given design also provides additional effects.

[0026] Rigid and hermetic fixing of the detector case on the rod acoustic waveguide allows to provide detector fire safety because it isolates the acoustical-electrical transducer from the operating medium the level of which is measured by the detector. Fire hazardous liquids can form such a medium.

[0027] Another additional effect results due to the fact that the rigid fixing of the detector case on the rod acoustic waveguide does not influence the detector performance only at the operating frequency. For acoustic oscillations of other frequencies which may influence the detector accuracy the case acts as an acoustic filter. Thus in the given design the detector noise immunity increases. The plate isolating the resonator space of the rod acoustic waveguide plays the same role but to a lesser extent.

[0028] Since the waveguide is fixed to the case in the zone of oscillations nodes, i.e. in the zone characterized by high acoustic impedance, the external actions lead to small oscillations in the waveguide at operating frequency because acoustic impedance depends on frequency. Such fixing can be considered as an acoustic rejection filter at operating frequency.

[0029] Positioning of the sensitive zone, the hollow resonator, at the end of the rod acoustic waveguide allows to place the detector arbitrarily at the installation site. The rod acoustic waveguide can contact with liquid and the spatial arrangement of the detector does not practically influence the detector properties to determine the liquid level. The contact with liquid of the rod acoustic waveguide zone where the hollow resonator situates is important for measurement. That is why the detector can be oriented arbitrarily; the main thing is that the resonator should be on the liquid indication level.

[0030] When indicating high-temperature and low-temperature liquids the extended rod acoustic waveguide allows to place the acoustical-electrical transducer outside the zone with extremal temperature and pressure.

[0031] Said new features of the detector design allow to state that the detector fulfills the patentability require-

ments.

Brief Description of Figures

[0032] The invention is illustrated by the following figures:

Fig.1 represents the detector design.

Fig.2 represents fixing of the detector case to the rod acoustic waveguide.

Fig.3 represents a variant of detector fixing on the base.

Fig.4 represents time diagrams explaining the detector performance.

Invention Embodiment

[0033] The detector design (Fig.1) includes a rod acoustic waveguide 2 on one end of which there is an acoustical-electrical transducer 3, on the other - a hollow resonator 4. A detector case 1 is fixed rigidly and hermetically on the surface of the rod acoustic waveguide 2 in the zone of minimum oscillations 6 of the rod acoustic waveguide 2 at the detector operating frequency. The space 5 of the resonator 4 is isolated from the external medium by the plate 8. The case 1 contains an attachment means 7 for attaching said case 1 to an external base. The end of the rod acoustic waveguide 2 with the acoustical-electrical transducer 3 and an electronic circuit board 9 with an impulse generator circuit and a circuit for detector signals processing are placed in the detector case 1. The acoustical-electrical transducer 3 is connected with the board 9 by conductors 10. The detector board is connected to an external electrical circuit by a cable 11 which is introduced in the detector case 1 through a hermetic gland 12. A hermetic cover 13 isolates the detector case space with the board 9 from the external medium.

[0034] The detector case 1 (Fig.2) has a thickness of L_k with $L_k < W/12$ in the place of fixing on the rod acoustic waveguide 2. This joint(fixing) 14 can be of welded type.

[0035] The attachment means 7 for attaching said case 1 to the external base 15 is made in the form of a threaded connection (Fig.3).

[0036] The detector operates as follows.

[0037] The acoustical-electrical transducer 3 situated on one end of the rod acoustic waveguide 2 generates periodically oscillations in the waveguide which have the form of impulse signals with sinusoidal filling. Impulse signals are generated by an electronic generator situated on the board 9. The signals propagate along the rod acoustic waveguide 2 and when reaching the hollow resonator 4 which is located on the opposite to the acoustical-electrical transducer 3 end of the waveguide excite oscillations in it. The resonator 4 oscillations are damped ones, whereby the damping factor to a large extent depends on the properties of the

medium wherein the resonator is placed. If the medium has a small wave resistance at the operating frequency then the damping factor is small and oscillations damp slowly. If the medium wherein the resonator is placed has a resistance comparable to the resonator output resistance, like an acoustic radiator, then acoustic oscillations appear in the medium and there occur energy emission from the resonator into the medium what is equivalent to a sufficient increase of resonator damping factor. In this case the resonator 4 oscillations damp rapidly.

[0038] The resonator 4 oscillations propagate in the rod acoustic wave guide 2 towards the acoustical-electrical transducer 3 and reaching it are converted into an electrical signal (Fig.4). This signal repeats in form oscillations in the waveguide which in their turn are similar to the resonator oscillations. Thus the electrical signal has a form of slowly damped oscillations, i.e. oscillations with small damping factor if the resonator is placed in the medium with small resistance, for example in a gaseous one (upper oscillogram in Fig.4). And vice versa, when the resonator is placed in the medium with a resistance greater than gaseous medium resistance, for example in liquid, the electric signal has a form of fast damped oscillations, i.e. oscillations with greater damping factor (lower oscillogram in Fig.4).

[0039] According to the damping factor the detector signal processing circuit forms the output detector signal. This signal has a relay character and carries information about the type of the medium wherein the resonator 4 is placed, namely whether the medium is liquid or gaseous. Said signal is transmitted to the external circuit via the cable 11.

[0040] The detector space with the acoustical-electrical transducer 3 and the board 9 is isolated from the external medium by means of the welded joint of the rod acoustic waveguide 2 and the case 1, gland 12 of the cable 11 and the hermetic cover 13. Therefore the medium in which the detector case is placed does not influence operation of the electronic circuit and the transducer.

[0041] The vibrations of the base to which the detector is fixed do not practically reach the acoustical-electrical transducer and therefore they do not influence the detector operation. This occurs due to the threaded connection of the attachment means 7 which transmits the case oscillations to the detector case 1 badly (because of oscillations energy absorption by friction surfaces of the threaded connection) as well as due to the location of the joint 14 in the zone of minimum oscillations of rod acoustic waveguide 2. This zone is characterized by a great resistance owing to which there is essentially no oscillations penetration both from the waveguide and into the waveguide.

[0042] The liquid level detector has an oscillatory system Q-factor which is determined by the properties of the medium in which the sensitive detector element - the hollow resonator - is placed.

[0043] The acoustical-electrical transducer in the detector can be represented by an oscillatory system, whereby the Q-factor of said oscillatory system should be determined only by oscillatory properties of the resonator and should not depend on:

properties of the medium wherein the waveguide is situated;
the plate which covers the resonator space hermetically.

[0044] Besides it is necessary that the rod oscillations minimum is in the place of the fixing of the detector case on the waveguide regardless the medium properties where the detector is situated.

[0045] For this purpose the dimensions of three main parts of the detector - the waveguide, the resonator and the plate - should have certain wave related dimensions.

[0046] It is convenient technologically if the main parts of the indicator oscillatory system (the waveguide, the resonator and the plate) are made from the same material and have the same external diameters.

[0047] The plate width L_p is chosen in such a way that it will little affect the resonator Q-factor. For this purpose the plate thickness should meet the following condition

$$L_p < W/2\pi \cdot \arctg(\alpha) \quad (1)$$

where α is the ratio of walls cross-section squares of the resonator and the waveguide.

[0048] The hollow resonator length L_r and the waveguide length L_w are chosen in such a way that the whole mechanical oscillatory system has a resonance frequency equal to the operating one and not depending on the wave resistance of the medium which contacts the resonator. In this case the place of minimum waveguide oscillations does not depend on the medium wave resistance. For this purpose it is necessary that dimensions L_r and L_w meet the following equations:

$$L_w = (2 \cdot k + 1) \cdot W/4 + L_p \quad (2)$$

$$L_r = W/2 \{ n + 1/\pi \cdot \arctg[2 \cdot \alpha (1 + \alpha^2) \cdot \tg(4 \pi L_p/W)] \} \quad (3)$$

where k, n - natural numbers.

[0049] If the mechanical system meets these conditions then the places of minimum waveguide oscillations are located in distances equal to odd numbers of $W/4$ from the waveguide end on which the acoustical-electrical transducer is fixed.

[0050] For example, when the external diameter is 12 mm, the resonator hollow part diameter is 10 mm and the plate thickness $L_p = 1$ mm which is sufficient for obtaining a firm construction it follows from (1) that the operating frequency wavelength in the material should be more than 21,2 mm. Let us choose the wave-length 36 mm which for alloyed steel corresponds to the oper-

ating frequency of about 140 kHz. The resonator length according to (3) is equal to 26,65 mm when $n=1$. The waveguide length L_w from (2) will be 100 mm when $k=5$. Since the distance between the zone of the waveguide fixing on the case and the transducer shall be an odd number of wavelength quarters, this distance L in this case can be equal to 9 mm, 27 mm, 45 mm etc.

Industrial Applicability

[0051] The ultrasonic liquid level detector according to the invention can be used for level monitoring of different liquids including fire hazardous ones. The detector can be installed on any bases, it is simple in design and adaptable to streamlined production. It has high sensitivity and small dependence on operating conditions, in particular waveguide contamination.

[0052] High mechanical strength and absolute leak-proofness of the design allow to use the ultrasonic liquid level detector in extreme conditions including level indication of such products as liquefied gases, e.g. liquefied air.

[0053] Since the rod acoustic waveguide of the detector can be made rather long (tens of centimeters), there is an opportunity to separate the sensitive zone, i.e. the resonator from the acoustical-electrical transducer and the electrical circuit. Such separation possibility allows to use the detector for measurement of high-temperature liquids.

Claims

1. Ultrasonic liquid level detector comprising a detector case, a rod acoustic waveguide on one end of which there is an acoustical-electrical transducer and on the other - a hollow resonator, characterized in that
 - the resonator space is isolated from an external medium, and
 - the detector case is fixed rigidly and hermetically on the surface of the rod acoustic waveguide in a zone of minimum rod oscillations of the rod acoustic waveguide at detector operating frequency and contains an attachment means for attaching the detector case to an external base.
2. Detector according to claim 1, characterized in that the resonator space is isolated from the external medium by a plate which is rigidly and hermetically fixed to the rod acoustic waveguide, whereby the plate thickness is less than $W/12$ where W is the sound wavelength in the rod acoustic waveguide at operating frequency.
3. Detector according to claim 1, characterized in that the zone of case fixing on the surface of the rod

acoustic waveguide is located at a distance L from the acoustical-electrical transducer with

$$W/4 \cdot [(2 \cdot k + 1) = 1/3] > L > W/4 \cdot [(2 \cdot k + 1) - 1/3],$$

5

where

W - sound wavelength in the rod acoustic waveguide at operating frequency;

k - natural number.

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4. Detector according to claim 1, characterized in that the detector case thickness in the fixing place on the rod acoustic waveguide is less than $W/12$, where W is the sound wavelength in the rod acoustic waveguide at operating frequency. 15
5. Detector according to claim 1, characterized in that said attachment means for attaching the detector to the external base is made in the form of a threaded connection. 20

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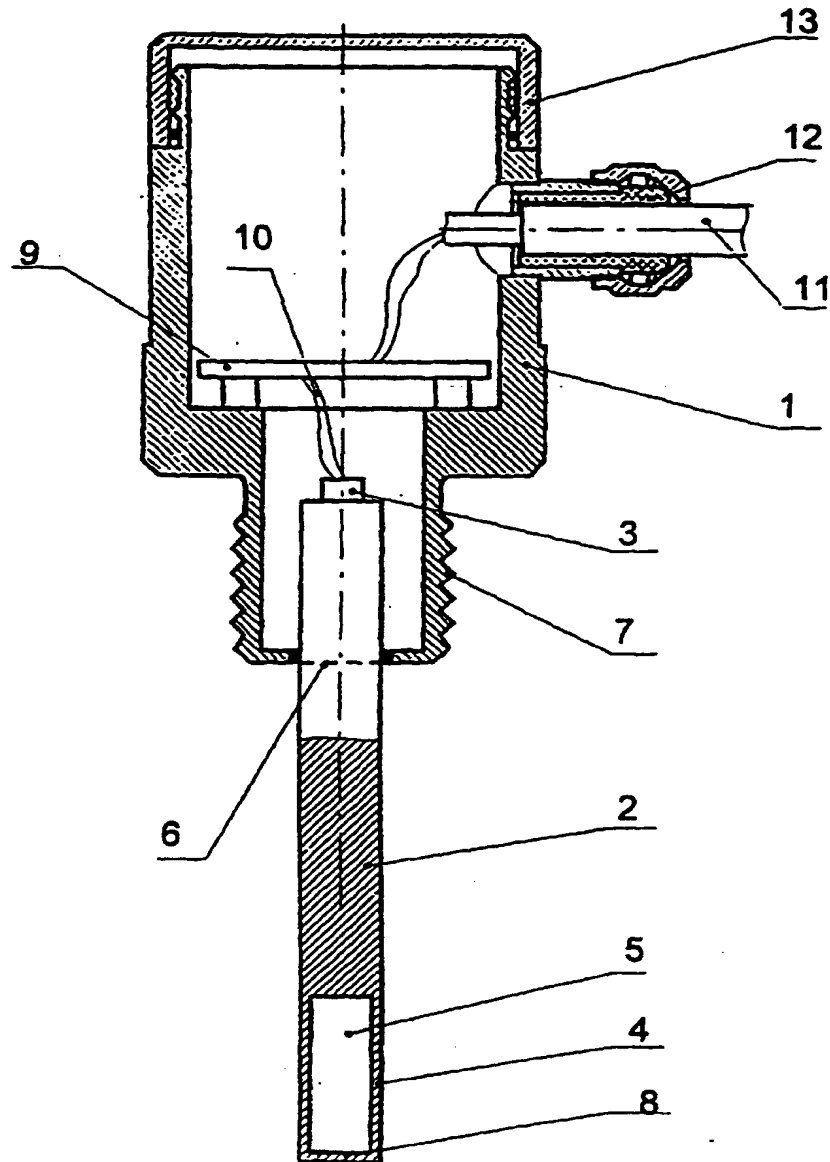


FIG 1

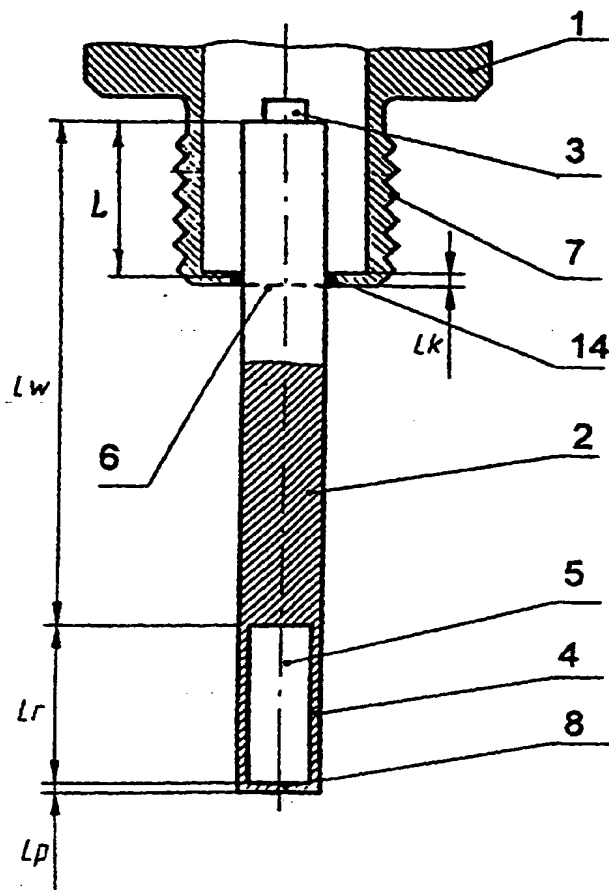


FIG 2

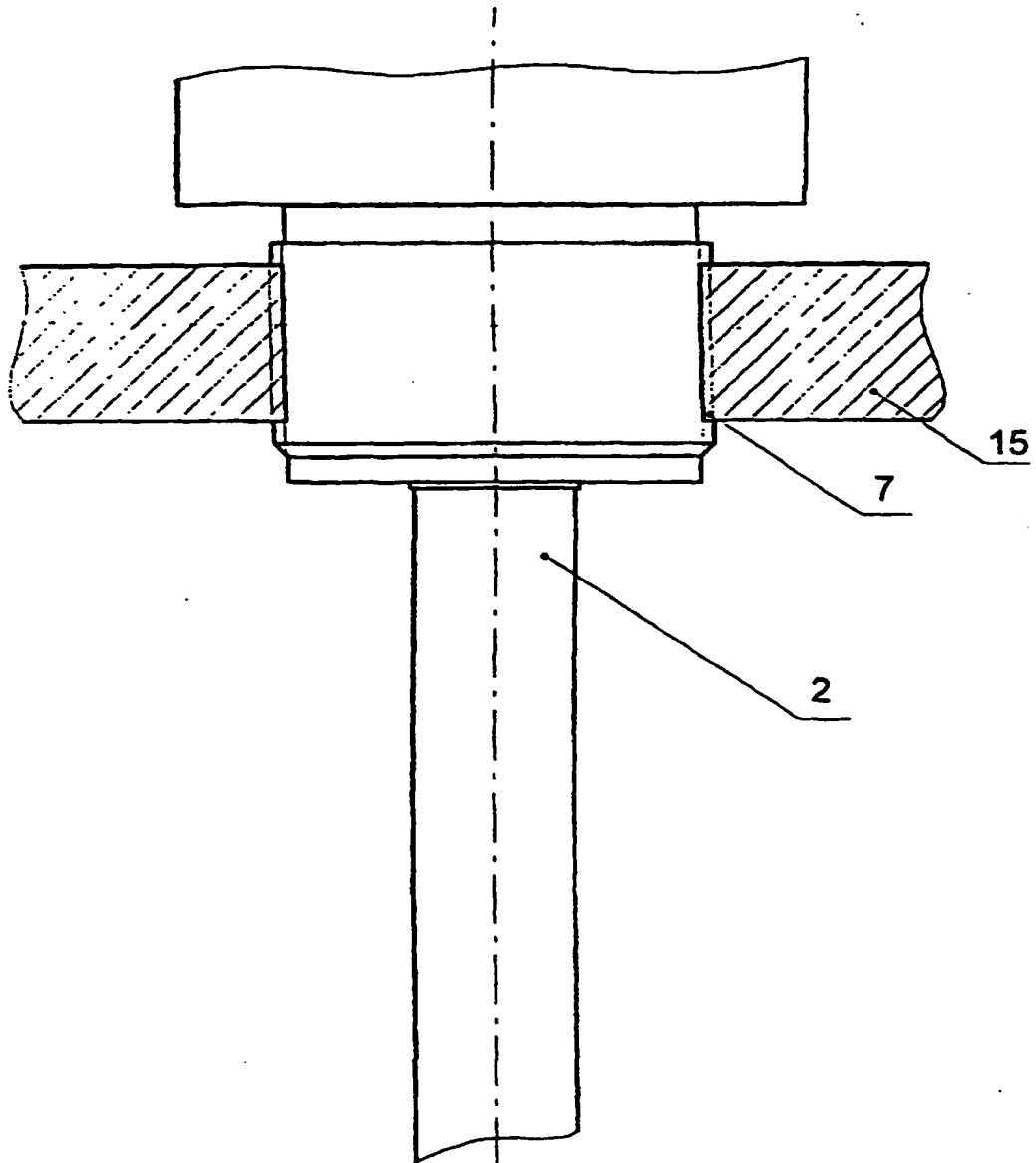
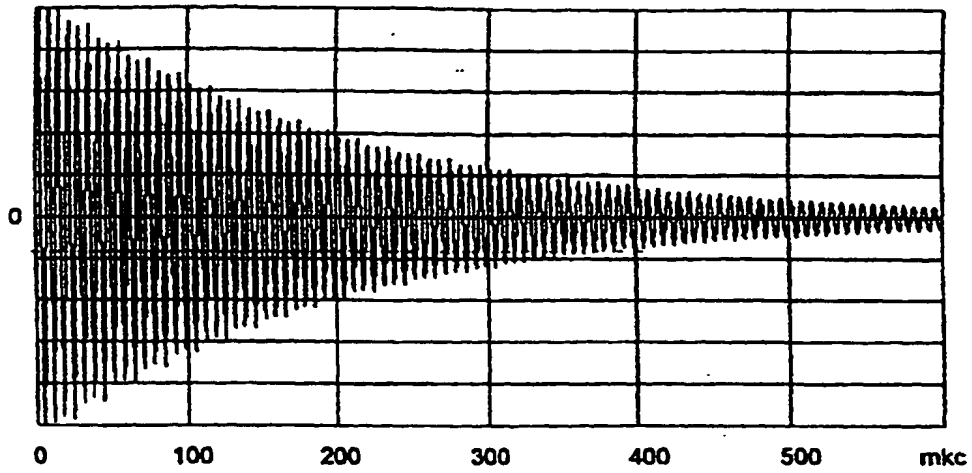
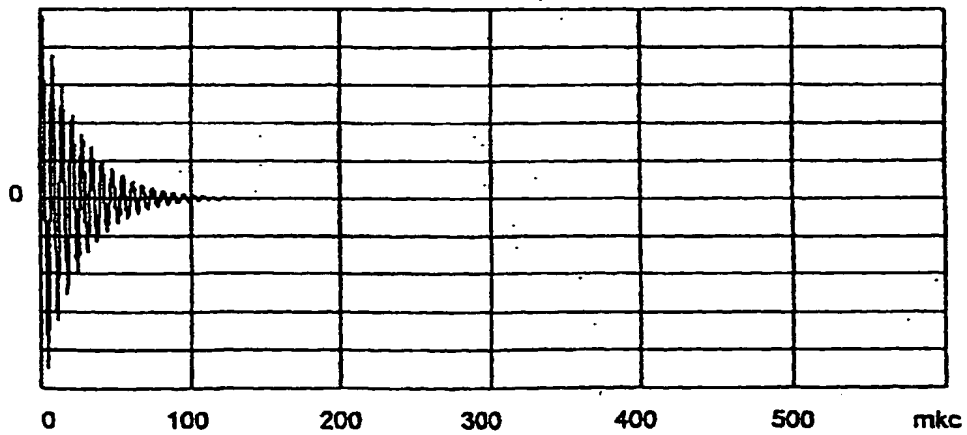


FIG 3



The time diagram, when the detector is in a gas



The time diagram, when the detector is in a liquid

FIG 4

INTERNATIONAL SEARCH REPORT

International application No.

PCT/RU 98/00210

A. CLASSIFICATION OF SUBJECT MATTER		
IPC ⁶ : G01F 23/296 According to International Patent Classification (IPC) or to both national classification and IPC		
B. FIELDS SEARCHED		
Minimum documentation searched (classification system followed by classification symbols)		
IPC ⁶ : G01F 23/00, 23/22, 23/28, 23/296		
Documentation searched other than minimum documentation to the extent that such documents are included in the fields searched		
Electronic data base consulted during the international search (name of data base and, where practicable, search terms used)		
C. DOCUMENTS CONSIDERED TO BE RELEVANT		
Category*	Citation of document, with indication, where appropriate, of the relevant passages	Relevant to claim No.
A	US 4594891 A (VEGA GRIESHABER GMBH & CO.), 17 June 1986 (17.06.86)	1-5
A	US 4785663 A (EERHARD F.HERMANN), 22 November 1988 (22.11.88)	1-5
A	GB 2281621 A (YAMAICHI ELECTRONICS CO., LTD), 08 March 1995 (08.03.95), the abstract	1
A	SU 1721443 A1 (A.K.BROVTSYN et al.), 23 March 1992 (23.03.92)	1-5
<input type="checkbox"/> Further documents are listed in the continuation of Box C. <input type="checkbox"/> See patent family annex.		
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Date of the actual completion of the international search 29 September 1998 (29.09.98)		Date of mailing of the international search report 14 October 1998 (14.10.98)
Name and mailing address of the ISA/ RU		Authorized officer
Facsimile No.		Telephone No.

Form PCT/ISA/210 (second sheet) (July 1997)